



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Communities awarded for innovative welfare-to-work programs**

**OLYMPIA** – Three community partnerships in Washington received top honors for innovative projects that help move families from welfare to work, Washington WorkFirst officials announced today.

Projects in three areas – Snohomish County; Spokane and Lincoln counties; and Asotin, Garfield and Whitman counties – will receive state innovation awards for efforts that achieve WorkFirst's goals of helping families make the transition from welfare to self-sufficiency.

"The competition this year was tight," said Roxanne Lowe, executive policy analyst with the Office of Financial Management. "Sixteen programs were nominated for innovation awards. An interagency panel of judges determined three to be the best examples of multi-agency partnering in Washington. But all of the projects are commendable models that have made a significant difference for families. Other communities can learn from these successes."

The annual awards are given to WorkFirst Local Planning Areas, local partnerships of government agencies, nonprofit community organizations and other groups that provide services for WorkFirst participants.

Other innovative projects considered for awards were located in Clark, Kittitas, Klickitat, Lewis, Lincoln, Skamania, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom and Yakima counties. Descriptions of all nominated programs are available on the WorkFirst Web site at [www.wa.gov/workfirst](http://www.wa.gov/workfirst).

Winning projects are:

### **Basic Life Skills**

#### **Winner: Snohomish County and South Snohomish WorkFirst Local Planning Areas**

The Basic Life Skills program was created as a prelude to college job skills training. It was designed to keep WorkFirst participants engaged in activities that prepare them for work while they wait to begin training in such areas as customer service, finance and office work, and medical office specialist skills.

Everett Community College and Edmonds Community College use computer programs that enable students to work at their own pace with support from an instructor to increase math, reading and comprehension skills. At that same time, students develop good work behavior.

Basic Life Skills has increased class attendance. In addition, many students began training at a higher level than they would have, completed a general-equivalency diploma (GED), and resolved problems at home before classes began.

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## **Employability Certificates**

### **Winner: Spokane-Lincoln WorkFirst Local Planning Area**

The Employability Certificate program helped improve job placements for WorkFirst participants enrolled in job skills training through the Community Colleges of Spokane.

Students undergo ACT WorkKeys skills assessments that provide objective data on an individual's readiness to work. The assessments measure four skill areas needed in the workplace: math, reading comprehension, locating information, and teamwork. Certificates awarded to program graduates can be used to provide employers with certifiable evidence of an applicant's basic work skills.

A total of 360 students completed job training at the Community Colleges of Spokane between July 2001 and June 2002. Of those, 81 percent were placed into meaningful employment that year.

## **Workshops for WorkFirst participants**

### **Winner: Asotin-Garfield-Whitman WorkFirst Local Planning Area**

WorkFirst partners coordinated with community organizations to develop a series of workshops targeted to clients who have been on welfare for six or more months.

The workshops help participants identify issues that are preventing them from successfully finding and keeping a job. They are taught by experts from local counseling clinics, the YWCA, Rural Resources, Walla Walla Community College, and Rainier Services.

The project has enabled WorkFirst staff to more effectively address their clients' work barriers, and has allowed more partners to take ownership in the success of the WorkFirst program.

In past years, the state has provided winners with cash bonuses but is unable to do so this year due to limited revenue. Communities selected for WorkFirst performance bonuses announced last October also won't receive monetary awards.

"WorkFirst has fewer financial resources," Lowe said. "With the current economic challenges, it is more important than ever for government to be creative and work collaboratively. We must continue to find ways to help low-income parents compete in the job market and provide for their families."

WorkFirst services are jointly administered by the state's Department of Social and Health Services, Employment Security Department, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development.

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